

The Story of Christmas

by Nora A. Smith

"A great spiritual efficiency lies in story-telling".—*Froebel*.

Christmas Day, you know, dear children, is Christ's day, Christ's birthday, and I want to tell you why we love it so much, and why we try to make every one happy when it comes each year.

A long, long time ago—more than eighteen hundred years—the baby Christ was born on Christmas Day; a baby so wonderful and so beautiful, who grew up to be a man so wise, so good, so patient and sweet that, every year, the people who know about Him love Him better and better, and are more and more glad when His birthday comes again. You see that He must have been very good and wonderful; for people have always remembered His birthday, and kept it lovingly for eighteen hundred years.

He was born, long years ago, in a land far, far away across the seas.

Before the baby Christ was born, Mary, His mother, had to make a long journey with her husband, Joseph. They made this journey to be taxed or counted; for in those days this could not be done in the town where people happened to live, but they must be numbered in the place where they were born.

In that far-off time the only way of traveling was on a horse, or a camel, or a good, patient donkey. Camels and horses cost a great deal of money, and Mary was very poor; so she rode on a quiet, safe donkey, while Joseph walked by her side, leading him and leaning on his stick. Mary was very young, and beautiful, I think, but Joseph was a great deal older than she.

People dress nowadays, in those distant countries, just as they did so many years ago, so we know that Mary must have worn a long, thick dress, falling all about her in heavy folds, and that she had a soft white veil over her head and neck, and across her face. Mary lived in Nazareth, and the journey they were making was to Bethlehem, many miles away.

They were a long time traveling, I am sure; for donkeys are slow, though they are so careful, and Mary must have been very tired before they came to the end of their journey.

They had traveled all day, and it was almost dark when they came near to Bethlehem, to the town where the baby Christ was to be born. There was the place they were to stay,—a kind of inn, or lodging-house, but not at all like those you know about.

They have them today in that far-off country, just as they built them so many years ago.

It was a low, flat-roofed, stone building, with no windows and only one large door. There were no nicely furnished bed rooms inside, and no soft white beds for the tired travelers; there were only little places built into the stones of the wall, something like the berths on steamboats nowadays, and each traveler brought his own bedding. No pretty garden was in front of the inn, for the road ran close to the very door, so that its dust lay upon the doorsill. All around the house, to a high, rocky hill at the

back, a heavy stone fence was built, so that the people and the animals inside might be kept safe.

Mary and Joseph could not get very near the inn; for the whole road in front was filled with camels and donkeys and sheep and cows, while a great many men were going to and fro, taking care of the animals. Some of these people had come to Bethlehem to pay their taxes, as Mary and Joseph had done, and others were staying for the night on their way to Jerusalem, a large city a little further on.

The yard was filled, too, with camels and sheep; and men were lying on the ground beside them, resting and watching and keeping them safe. The inn was so full and the yard was so full of people that there was no room for anybody else, and the keeper had to take Joseph and Mary through the house and back to the high hill, where they found another place that was used for a stable. This had only a door and front, and deep caves were behind, stretching far into the rocks.

This was the spot where Christ was born. Think how poor a place!—but Mary was glad to be there, after all; and when the Christ-child came, He was like other babies, and had so lately come from heaven that He was happy everywhere.

There were mangers all around the cave, where the cattle and sheep were fed, and great heaps of hay and straw were lying on the floor. Then, I think, there were brown-eyed cows and oxen there, and quiet, woolly sheep, and perhaps even some dogs that had come in to take care of the sheep.

And there in the cave, by and by, the wonderful baby came, and they wrapped Him up and laid Him in a manger.

All the stars in the sky shone brightly that night, for they knew the Christ-child was born, and the angels in heaven sang together for joy. The angels knew about the lovely child, and were glad that He had come to help the people on earth to be good.

There lay the beautiful baby, with a manger for His bed, and oxen and sheep all sleeping quietly round Him. His mother watched Him and loved Him, and by and by many people came to see Him, for they had heard that a wonderful child was to be born in Bethlehem. All the people in the inn visited Him, and even the shepherds left their flocks in the fields and sought the child and His mother.

But the baby was very tiny, and could not talk any more than any other tiny child, so He lay in His mother's lap, or in the manger, and only looked at the people. So after they had seen Him and loved Him, they went away again.

After a time, when the baby had grown larger, Mary took Him back to Nazareth, and there He lived and grew up.

And He grew to be such a sweet, wise, loving boy, such a tender, helpful man, and He said so many good and beautiful things, that everyone who knew Him, loved Him. Many of the things He said are in the Bible, you know, and a great many beautiful stories of the things He used to do while He was on earth.

He loved little children like you very much, and often used to take them up in His arms and talk to them.

And this is the reason we love Christmas Day so much, and try to make everybody happy when

it comes around each year. This is the reason; because Christ, who was born on Christmas Day, has helped us all to be good so many, many times, and because He was the best Christmas present the world ever had!

Source:

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